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ABSTRACT

The rising health and social services needs of the elderly can be met in part by using the potential productivity of older people. This study examined the extent to which older people serve as a resource and the potentiality for further expanding their productive contributions. The Minnesota Senior Study involved a telephone survey with a representative statewide sample of approximately 1,500 non-institutionalized Minnesotans age 60 and older. Data suggest that Minnesotans age 60 and older do considerably more volunteer work than would be expected, judging from national surveys. It is estimated that Minnesotans contribute about 70 million hours a year in volunteer time. Three-fifths of older Minnesotans reported volunteer work for organizations; two-fifths reported voluntary service to individuals in their communities; and three-fifths reported helping their families. Overall, only 16% did not do any of these types of volunteer work. Even so, it appears that most volunteers do not commit large amounts of time; about one-half of older volunteers spent less than a couple of hours per week in volunteer activities. Income, education, being married, being employed, not having functional problems, being young-old, living in a non-metropolitan area, and being able to drive (or being the spouse of a driver) were all positively associated with the propensity to volunteer. (Author/NB)

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Seventy Million Hours:

The Voluntary Contributions of Older Minnesotans*

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Abstract

Data from the Minnesota Senior Study suggest that Minnesotans age 60 and older do considerably more volunteer work than would be expected, judging from national surveys. It is estimated that Minnesotans contribute about 70 million hours a year in volunteer time. Three-fifths of older Minnesotans do volunteer work for organizations; two-fifths of older Minnesotans provide voluntary services to individuals in their communities; and three-fifths provide help to their families. Overall, only 16 percent do not do any to these types of volunteer work. Even so, it appears that most volunteers do not commit large amounts of time; about half of older volunteers spend less than a couple of hours per week in volunteer activities. Income, education, being married, being employed, not having functional problems, being young-old, living in a non-metropolitan area, and being able to drive (or being the spouse of a driver) are all positively associated with the propensity to volunteer.

70 Million Hours: The Voluntary Contributions of Older Minnesotans

Recent increases in longevity, and the aging of the "baby boom" generation, mean that ever-greater proportions of our population will be over 75 and over 85. One of the consequences of having an aging society is that there are rising demands for health care, transportation and other social services (see Sheppard and Rix, 1977; Myers et al., 1986). Who will provide those services?

The challenge of meeting the demands of the elderly is made more complicated by other trends. For example, inflation has magnified the costs of social and health services. Cutbacks in federal expenditures have also intensified the competition between the old and the young in their needs for services (see Kieffer, 1986). Moreover, the participation of more and more women in the paid labor force means that women are less available, either for informally helping their relatives, friends and neighbors, or for serving as volunteers in organizations (see Romero, 1986).

One solution for meeting the rising needs of the elderly is for older people to essentially "pay their own way"--that is, to use the potential productivity of older people so that the old become more of a social resource than a liability.

> Of particular interest to many observers is whether the vast reservoir of active, healthy, experienced, and educated retired persons present in an aging society can be more effectively tapped, on an unpaid basis, to meet projected increases in demands for social and health services (Committee on an Aging Society, 1986:5).

The purpose of this paper is to examine the extent to which older people today serve as a resource and the potentiality for further expanding their productive contributions. As we will discuss below, from data based on a state wide survey of elderly in Minnesota, we estimate that *older Minnesotans currently contribute somewhat over 70 million hours per year in voluntary services.*

The Minnesota Senior Study

The Minnesota Senior Study was conducted by Wilder Research Center and entailed a telephone survey with a representative state wide sample of about 1,500 non-institutionalized Minnesotans age 60 and older. Probability sampling techniques, with stratification by region, and a weighting procedure[1] were used so that the sample represented persons age 60 or older living in all regions throughout Minnesota.

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[1] Since only one person age 60 or older was interviewed in each household, persons who live alone or who are the only person 60 or older in their households are overrepresented in the sample. To adjust for this

Eligible respondents were selected through random digit dialing to Minnesota telephone exchanges. When more than one respondent age 60 or older resided in the household, the eligible respondent was randomly selected by using the most recent birthday method of respondent selection (Salmon and Nichols, 1983). Based on the total of eligible cases, the response rate was 68 percent.[2] A comparison of our sample with Census data and 1990 population estimates suggests that, overall, the study sample is an adequate representation of non-institutionalized Minnesota seniors 60 years and older in households with telephones.

In order to assess the needs and resources of older persons, the questionnaire covered a broad range of topics. These included: demographic characteristics (age, income, education, etc.); housing; transportation; health and daily functioning; social supports; employment; and participation in volunteer work. A decision was made early in the design of the study to gather data on how the elderly contribute to their society, in addition to assessing their needs. Therefore, questions were asked not just on paid work but also on a variety of unpaid types of work--caregiving to spouses, parents and others who are ill; care for grandchildren; other types of help to adult children; help to neighbors or others in the community; and volunteer work for organizations.

A number of efforts were pursued to make the data as representative and reliable as possible. For example, telephone numbers were called 10 times if there was no answer, before a number was excluded. Potential respondents who initially refused to participate were all called again and given another chance to be part of the sample. When some answers were unclear, these respondents were called back. Furthermore, special arrangements were made to gather information on respondents who might have difficulty with telephone interviews (for example, informants were used when respondents were too impaired to answer questions themselves and translators were made available for those who were not fluent in English). The questionnaire was pre-tested and underwent many revisions; and the interviewers were given extensive training and supervision.

Despite these efforts to assure the quality of the data, the Minnesota Senior Study has a number of limitations.

- With "older Minnesotans" defined as 60 and over, the sample tends to be weighted toward the young-old.
- The sample is drawn from non-institutionalized elderly. Especially since Minnesota has a relatively high rate of institutionalization for the elderly, the exclusion of the institutionalized elderly means that the most frail and the most needy are systematically left out of the sample.

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over-representation, responses were weighted by the number of persons 60 years old or older in the home. The weighted sample, 2,214, is equal to the number of persons 60 and older living in the 1,500 households.

[2] Seven hundred thirty eight seniors refused to participate, were eliminated because of insurmountable physical or language problems, or had incomplete surveys when interviewing was terminated.

- Because the study was based on telephone interviews, we not only did not reach elderly without telephones, it is also likely that we have undercounted elderly who live in boarding houses or inner city hotels where there is only one phone per building or per hallway.
- Because of time constraints and the need to ask a broad range of questions, the coverage of each topic is quite limited and there are few details on most issues.
- For some topics, the wording of the questions and the coding of both closed-ended and open-ended responses were particularly problematic. Some of the most problematic data were associated with the questions on volunteering--a topic on which previous research has been sparse so that there is little guidance available on how to ask questions or code responses.

Background

There has been little systematic research on volunteer work, so that there is much less information available on unpaid work than on paid work, for either young or old people. In fact, "volunteer work" is not easy to define. Like paid work, volunteer work subsumes a very large number of specific jobs. Unlike paid labor, however, there is no standard classification system[3] for defining and categorizing voluntary labor. Thus, a volunteer might be the president or chair of a charitable foundation or an usher for a church function or someone who stuffs envelopes for a political campaign or someone who delivers "meals-on-wheels" or a visitor at a hospital, etc. People who do any of these types of jobs might be called volunteers; and this is just a small sample of types of volunteer jobs or positions.

What is Volunteer Work? One of the difficulties in definition is that volunteering might include a narrow or broad range of activities. Should volunteer work only include activities done for organizations? Or, should helping a neighbor (for example, bringing food or offering transportation) also be considered voluntary service? Is babysitting for a grandchild volunteer work? Both broad and narrow definitions are problematic, though in different ways. On the one hand, if we use a very broad definition, it is difficult to draw limits. How do we distinguish between just socializing with a friend and volunteer-type help? On the other hand, if we use a narrow definition--for example, unpaid work for charitable organizations--we are clearly leaving out a wide set of unpaid services that people do for others. Logically, this is also problematic. If a "volunteer" for a church, for example, provides transportation services to a neighbor under the aegis of a church, why should the same type of service (giving a ride to a neighbor) not be counted

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[3] There is no system for classifying volunteer work as was developed by Hauser and Featherman (1977) for occupational stratification.

as volunteering if this service is provided on an informal basis? (See Chambre, 1984; Kieffer, 1986; Morgan, 1986.)

There are also problems of definition with regard to motivation and compensation. Should volunteering only be defined as work for which the reward is altruistic? Can volunteers be compensated in any way--and still be considered volunteers? If people provide services for which they are reimbursed not in money but through an exchange of services--is that volunteering? (See Cahn, 1988; Romero, 1986.)

Unfortunately, there is no standard definition. In the Minnesota Senior Study,we opted for a broad rather than a narrow definition of volunteer work, so that we could examine the contributions of older Minnesotans as fully as possible. However, we also decided to ask separate questions on "formal" and "informal" volunteering--that is, volunteer work for organizations versus voluntary services to individuals.

How Many Americans Volunteer? Given the inconsistency in definitions of volunteering, it is not surprising that there is wide variability in estimates of how many Americans do volunteer work. Even surveys conducted in the same year report different numbers of volunteers. Estimates of numbers of volunteers range from 16 percent to 55 percent, for ages 18-64, and from 9 percent to 37 percent, for ages 65 and older. The highest estimates of volunteering come from the Gallup surveys, which use a broad definition and include informal help to friends, as well as volunteer work for organizations (that is, volunteer work is doing "work in some way to help others for no monetary pay"). Most other studies are based on a much more restricted definition. (See Hodgkinson and Weitzman, 1988; Worthy and Ventura-Merkel, 1982.)

Findings from previous studies suggest that there has been an increase in volunteering and that much of the growth in volunteering has come from increased participation by men (see Morgan, 1986). Using a narrow definition of volunteer work, Romero (1986) reports that the percentage of women volunteering increased from 21 percent in the mid-1960s to 28 percent in the mid-1980s, while men's rate of volunteering increased from 15 percent to 30 percent during the same time period.

A recent Gallup survey found a considerably higher rate of volunteering in the Midwest (which, of course, includes Minnesota) than in other regions of the United States. This survey on giving and volunteering showed that 57 percent of Midwesterners do volunteer work, compared to 46 percent in the West, 41 percent in the East, and 39 percent in the South (Hodgkinson and Weitzman, 1988).

Studies have shown that a large portion of volunteering actually is done by a very small proportion of the community. Morgan (1986:76) cautions that "...even among these groups [that

volunteer] a few gave substantial amounts while many gave little or none, making the aggregate estimates shaky."

Older Americans as Volunteers. Various surveys have shown that, with age, there is a decreasing amount of volunteering and that the elderly volunteer at the lowest rate of all adults (Herzog, et al., 1989; Hodgkinson and Weitzman, 1988; Lackner and Koeck, 1980). As Hamilton et al. (1988:5) point out, however, while the elderly are somewhat less likely to volunteer, "as a group retirees are older, poorer and less well-educated -- all factors that are related to lower rates of volunteering."

There is difficulty in making easy comparisons between the "elderly" and other age groups, not only because of varying definitions of volunteer work, but also because studies vary widely in how they operationally define "older adults." For example, Hamilton et al. (1988) have data on older Americans--defined as 45+; other studies use 55+, 60+ or 65+ as a cutoff age. The findings are markedly different. Hamilton et al. (1988) report that 39 percent of older Americans (i.e., 45+) volunteer; other studies, based on a narrow definition of volunteering and using data on adults age 60+ or 65+, find that 9 to 22 percent volunteer (see Chambre, 1984; Herzog et al., 1989). If help to families (adult children, grandchildren and other relatives) were included as "volunteer work," many more elderly would be defined as volunteers, since it appears that more than two thirds of elderly provide services to their families, such as babysitting for grandchildren and caring for ill family members (see Harris, 1975, in Herzog et al., 1989).

In measuring amount of volunteering, the issue is not only how many volunteer but how much time is spent by those who do volunteer. Various studies have shown that most elderly volunteers do not spend large amounts of time in their volunteer work. One study, for example, found that only 5 percent of older adult volunteers worked more than 6 hours a week (see in Worthy and Ventura-Merkel, 1982).

A major rationale for recruiting older volunteers is that retirees ought to have more time to do volunteer work than people in the paid labor force. We might expect, then, that older retirees would be more likely to volunteer than older adults who are still employed. In fact, the reverse is true (Morgan, 1986). The elderly who remain in the labor force are more likely to volunteer than retired elderly. Even so, among older volunteers, those who are retired spend somewhat more time in volunteering than those still in the labor force (Chambre, 1984). Furthermore, when we make comparisons between retirees and older labor force participants, we have to keep in mind the substantial age and health differences between these groups. Older labor force participants, on average, are considerably younger than retirees and they are much less likely to have health and functional problems.

There are a number of significant barriers to volunteering by older people. For example, older potential volunteers are more likely than younger adults to suffer from poor health, to have

functional disabilities, to lack transportation, and/or to have low incomes. Even if rates of volunteering decline with age, however, there are still substantial numbers of elderly, even among the old-old and the oldest-old, who continue to volunteer. Worthy and Ventura-Merkel (1982), in their review of surveys on volunteering, noted that about an eighth of Americans over age 80 are volunteers.

Who Volunteers? In addition to age, there are several other variables associated with volunteering. Undoubtedly, the most significant is social class. People with higher incomes and more education are more likely to volunteer. Moreover, among volunteers, the more affluent and the better educated are the most active and give the most time (Chambre, 1984; Hodgkinson and Weitzman, 1988; Kieffer, 1986; Romero, 1986). Morgan (1986:76) noted:

> We also know from an earlier study asking about all volunteer work--for organizations or relatives--that income dominated the explanations, so much so that, surprisingly, the single best predictor was the number of modern appliances in the home.

Among the elderly, income and education also affect the amount of volunteering (Lemke and Moos, 1989). The proportion of well-educated, high income people in a particular population is likely to have an effect on the potential number of volunteers. More recent cohorts of elderly are more educated and have higher incomes, so there ought to be increasing percentages of older volunteers.

Two other factors which appear to have some influence on volunteering are marital status and gender. There is fairly good evidence that married people are more likely to be volunteers than unmarried people (Chambre, 1984; Hodgkinson and Weitzman, 1988). Exactly why this is so is not entirely clear. It may be that married people have less difficulty managing their day-to-day life and therefore have more time for volunteering. It is also possible that spouses facilitate and/or encourage volunteering types of activities--for example, by providing transportation or doing an activity with a spouse--and that married people sustain ties with larger networks, giving more opportunities to provide voluntary services. Married people also tend to have more income than unmarried people and the gap in income level may be enough to explain the difference in volunteering by marital status.

The effect of gender on volunteering is less clear. Evidence from various studies is mixed. Some studies report that women volunteer more. For example, Chambre (1984) asserts that women are more likely to volunteer at all stages of the life cycle. Herzog, et al. (1989), on the other hand, found no sex-difference in the likelihood of volunteering, although women spend somewhat more hours volunteering than men. As noted above, other studies suggest that women are *no longer* more likely to volunteer than men (see Romero, 1986; Morgan, 1986). Harris

(1981) reported that, among the elderly, the greatest increase in numbers of volunteers was from men. There is some evidence that men and women do somewhat different types of volunteer work. It appears that men are more likely to volunteer for recreational and work-related activities, while women volunteer for more health and education-related activities (Romero, 1986).

Church Work. A very large proportion of volunteering and charitable giving in the United States is through religious organizations. Almost all churches use volunteers for work in their congregations and associated activities. Moreover, churches sponsor or encourage other forms of charity and volunteering, especially in social welfare and education. It should not be surprising, then, that church members are considerably more likely to give to charity and to volunteer than non-members. Among the elderly (65+), according to the most recent Gallup survey , 38 percent of elderly who are members of a church or other religious organization are volunteers, compared to 26 percent of non-members. Furthermore, among church members, those who are the most active--that is, those who attend services at least once a week--are the most likely to volunteer their time (Hodgkinson and Weitzman, 1989; see also Hamilton, et al., 1988).

Why is it that churches are so important in fostering volunteer work? One reason may be that volunteer work is simply a part of everyday church work. Moreover, religious values also tend to foster a sense of community cohesion and responsibility for others in the community. This may be why church members are more likely to volunteer, in general, not just for church-sponsored activities (see Hodgkinson and Weitzman, 1989).

It is also possible that churches offer an indirect impetus to volunteer work--that is, they provide a focal organization and network of potential volunteers. In the 1960s, churches, especially Negro churches in the south, were the organizational linchpin of the Civil Rights Movement. Leadership for the Civil Rights Movement came from the churches; mass meetings happened in the churches; spiritual guidance came through the religious teachings of the churches; legitimacy for the movement was enhanced by the authority of the churches. In a similar way, religious establishments may be the organizational focal points of volunteering activities. This may be particularly true for the elderly population, which tends to have high rates of church membership. If there truly is a need for greatly increasing the numbers of older volunteers, a logical starting point for organizing older volunteers would be through churches, synagogues and other religious organizations. Religious organizations could serve the same energizing functions for an "older volunteer movement" that Negro churches gave to the the Civil Rights Movement. Religious organizations are in a particularly advantageous position to locate and recruit older volunteers; they can provide potential volunteers with a spiritual rationale for providing their services; they can offer recognition within their congregational community; and churches also can help to develop a lay leadership among older volunteers. For all these reasons, "church work" has

important implications for volunteering that go well beyond services provided to or through individual churches or particular religious organizations.

The Volunteer Potential. According to Hodgkinson and Weitzman (1988:4), there is a sizable untapped potential for increasing the amount of volunteering:

> *There is an enormous capacity to increase giving and volunteering in the United States...Of the three-fourths of respondents who believed that they should volunteer to help others, 50 percent did not volunteer in the past year.*

Others are not quite so sure about the untapped potential. Kieffer (1986), for example, noted that there are supposedly 6.5 million Americans who are 55 and over and who are interested in volunteering but he cautions that it is not at all clear that one could actually get them to do this work. Kieffer's point is important: the fact that a survey respondent says that he/she is "willing" to volunteer or that he/she (or people, in general) "should" volunteer is very different from actually participating as a volunteer.

The truth is that there is little understanding of why people volunteer. When respondents in surveys are asked about their motivations for volunteering, they tend to give multiple responses. Perhaps this suggests that there are multiple motivations and that "doing good" (altruism) is just one of a complex set of reasons for volunteering. Of course, if the motivations are complex, this means that motivating volunteers and potential volunteers is not likely to be an easy process. In a review of the "economics of voluntarism," Romero (1986) raises a number of issues for which it appears that there are as yet no clear answers. She notes, for example, that it is not clear if people are motivated to volunteer in general or by particular jobs. She also points to research evidence suggesting that people need to be compensated personally for volunteering but then she comments that we need further studies to show how to best provide compensation.

There are some special issues for older people who volunteer. One difference between younger and older volunteers is that older volunteers are more likely to see volunteering as filling a need for activity. In surveys, elderly volunteers are more likely to say that they volunteer to "keep me active;" they are also more likely to refer to "having time now" for volunteering (Hamilton, et al., 1988; Hodgkinson and Weitzman, 1988).

Why do some elderly volunteer--and not others? Perhaps there are volunteer-types--that is, people who can be counted on to provide all sorts of services, whenever volunteers are needed. Older volunteers tend to be people who volunteered when they were younger (Committee on Aging, 1986). Moreover, those who volunteer for one activity tend to volunteer for other activities (Lemke and Moos, 1989). It also appears, however, that age affects volunteering. The elderly are more likely to give poor health as a reason for not volunteering, or for not giving many hours (Hodgkinson and Weitzman, 1988). They are also more likely to say that lack of transportation

was a reason for not volunteering (Kieffer, 1986). There is also another factor: one major reason that many older people give for not volunteering is that *no one asked them!* The policy implications of this ought to be clear (Committee on Aging, 1986; Kieffer, 1986).

Ethical and Other Thorny Issues. It would be hard to argue that altruism is bad or that a society should discourage its members from voluntarily helping others in the community. Even so, there are three, interrelated, dilemmas concerning volunteer work.

First, there is the potential for exploitation of volunteers (see Cahn, 1988; Lackner and Koeck, 1980). Under what circumstances is it justifiable to *not* pay people for their labor? Traditionally, more voluntary labor has been done by women. In effect, women have done unpaid work, in large part, because of their limited opportunities to do paid work. There is a comparable issue with regard to encouraging the voluntary labor of older citizens. To the extent that the elderly are encouraged to leave the paid labor force, especially to the degree that older workers confront implicit age-discrimination in the work place, any movement to compel elderly to give voluntary service would be exploitative.

There is a second dilemma which is the flip-side of the first: how does the use of volunteers affect professional and other paid workers? Professional staff often are wary of non-expert volunteers taking over some of their specialized activities (see Kieffer, 1986; Romero, 1986). In a time of a recession, workers might very well view volunteers as potentially taking away their much-needed jobs. Labor unions are often suspicious of volunteer programs--and with good reason (see Kieffer, 1986). Moreover, there may be problems of reliability with volunteer workers. Because they are not paid, there is no way to ensure that volunteers come when they are supposed to, that they are available when needed, or that they don't quit after having received expensive training.

The third dilemma--really a whole set of issues and questions--relates to the implications of volunteering for governmental programs. Should volunteer work substitute for already existing entitlements or only for expanding the numbers and types of services? How should the government support volunteer programs? Under what circumstances is a volunteer program deemed to be less expensive or more expensive than a program which relies exclusively on paid staff? One of the outcomes of encouraging volunteering is that there may actually be a decrease in public services, if federal, state or local governments try to replace established entitlements with voluntary service programs (see Cahn, 1988).

Findings from the Minnesota Senior Study

Amount of Volunteering by Older Minnesotans. One of the surprising findings from this survey is that older Minnesotans appear to do considerably more volunteer work than would be expected

from national surveys. **Figure 1** is divided into three categories of volunteering: help to families, service to individuals, and volunteer work for organizations.[4] As this figure indicates, most older adults do some form of voluntary service: about three fifths do volunteer work for organizations (which would fit the narrowest definition of "volunteering"); a similar proportion help their families (with babysitting for grandchildren or providing other services to adult children); and about two fifths provide "services to individuals."[5]

When all of these activities are added together, only about 16 percent of older Minnesotans do none of these types of "volunteering." The implication is clear: older Minnesotans are a significant resource. They volunteer for organizations; they provide services to their neighbors and other individuals; and they help their families. Even using the most restricted definition of "volunteering"--volunteer work for organizations--most elderly (60%) are volunteers.

In assessing the amount of volunteering, however, it is important to examine not only how many people volunteer but also how many hours are contributed by those who do volunteer. The respondents were asked: "Thinking of the help you give both to other people and organizations--on the average, about how many hours do you spend doing these activities in your community each month?" This question does *not* distinguish between help to individuals and work for organizations, but rather asks for a *total per month* of time spent volunteering. Among those who

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[4] For help to families, respondents were asked two sets of questions: "Are you currently providing care for one or more persons because of their injury, disability, long-term illness, or inability to care for themselves?" and "In the past 3 months, have you helped your children in any of the following ways? Helped care for grandchildren. Helped out when someone was ill. Did things around their house such as home repairs, gardening or other projects. Did housekeeping housework, mending, sewing, cooking or laundry. Provided housing. Provided transportation." For voluntary service to individuals, respondents were asked: "Sometimes people help others by doing things such as driving them to appointments, church, shopping, or doctors; bringing them meals or groceries; helping with house or yard work; and so on. In the past 12 months, have you provided any of this kind of help? (If yes) what kinds of help? What else?..." For volunteer work for organizations, respondents were asked: "People also help organizations, such as churches, libraries, hospitals, neighborhood groups, service clubs, or political parties. In the past 12 months, have you provided help to organizations in your neighborhood or community? (If yes) What kinds of help have you given? What else..."

For service to individuals and volunteer work for organizations, respondents were not counted as being volunteers if they indicated that they spent zero hours doing these activities.

[5] Given the ambiguity in defining volunteer work, it seemed sensible to examine separately each of these types of volunteering. The questions associated with help to families were asked in an earlier section of the questionnaire--on social ties . This item was included in some of the data presented here in order to provide a full picture of the productivity and contributions made by older citizens. There may be some overlap between the responses to questions about help to families and the questions on "services to individuals," which was based on a question in the section on volunteering. That is, some respondents may have referred to helping families when describing what they do for "individuals." It is also likely, however, that if we had left out "help to families" as a separate category we would have missed a substantial number of services performed by the elderly. It appears that many respondents, when asked about help to individuals, did *not* include what they do for their families. Possibly, some respondents neglected to mention family-work because they had already talked about these activities in responding to previous questions. It is also possible that people tend to view help to families as a different kind of activity from help to neighbors or others. Family-work may be understood as based on obligation and affection; help to other individuals may be more likely to be interpreted as altruistic behavior.

volunteer, the mean is 14 hours per month. Basing our calculations on those who volunteer, we estimate that the total number of volunteer hours contributed *annually* by all older Minnesotans is approximately 70 million hours.[6]

Figure 2 shows the distribution of numbers of hours volunteered per month. Although a large portion of older Minnesotans volunteer, this table suggests that most older volunteers do *not* commit very large amounts of time. Less than a third spend 15 hours or more *a month* volunteering. Any paid job, including a part-time job, would be likely to involve far greater time demands. Of those who volunteer, half spend 7 hours a month or less--which is equivalent to less than 2 hours per week. We might conclude, then, that cumulatively the number of hours contributed by older adults in Minnesota is impressive--70 million hours a year. But most individual volunteers spend rather modest amounts of time in volunteering. If we count only those who contribute at least 40 hours a month--or the equivalent of a quarter time job (that is, 10 hours/week)--we find that less than 8 percent of older volunteers make that large a commitment.

The Work That Older Volunteers Do. Volunteering can mean hundreds of different jobs--from cutting grass for a church to chairing a committee to baking cakes for a community event to visiting patients in a hospital, etc. In order to get a general overview of this array of jobs, we have grouped the types of jobs into sub-categories. **Table 1** lists 3 types of help to families, 6 specific types of services to individuals, and 7 types of work for organizations. Types of help to families are care giving for someone who is ill or disabled, providing services to adult children, and caring for grandchildren. The six types of help to individuals are: providing transportation to individuals; visiting; house and yard care; helping individuals with food; person-to-person help (that is, help which requires face-to-face contact, such as child care or care giving for ill or disabled adults); and neighboring (such as running errands or house-watching). Types of help to organizations listed here are: church work (i.e, any type of volunteer work done for a church), general service to organizations (a diverse set of activities including ushering, telephone fundraising, doing clerical work for organizations, making handicrafts, etc.), work for citizenship organizations (such as Jaycees, the American Legion, Masons, and the League of Women Voters), providing food through organizations, work for social welfare/health organizations (such as the Salvation Army, Meals-on-Wheels, March of Dimes, and hospital auxiliaries), leadership/administrative activities, and providing transportation through organizations.

Table 1 shows the percentages of respondents who do each type of volunteer activity. Because a respondent could list multiple types of volunteer work, the percentages add up to more than the total of respondents who help their families, provide voluntary services to individuals and

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[6] This is based on a projection to the population of 669,253 Minnesotans age 60+.

do volunteer work for organizations (59%, 42% and 60%, respectively). This table suggests that *the types of jobs done for organizations versus individuals are generally quite different.* The most frequent type of help to organizations is church work. The most frequent type of help to individuals is providing transportation; 28 percent of the sample provide this help--or two thirds of those who give help to individuals. In fact, the large numbers of elderly who help others with transportation may help to explain why only 6 percent of the elderly in our sample said that they lack transportation (see Fischer et al., 1989). The differences between help to individuals and volunteer work for organizations suggest that informal services fill in the gaps left by formal helping organizations, and vice versa.

A Profile of Volunteers. Other studies have found that income and education are associated with volunteering. The findings of the Minnesota Senior Study are similar (see **Table 2**). According to our data, not only are those with higher incomes more likely to volunteer for organizations in general, they are also more likely to do volunteer work for two types of organizations, in particular: social welfare and citizenship-type organizations. However, income level is *not* significantly related to other types of voluntary services: income level is *not* related to help to families, to voluntary services to individuals, or to church work. These differential effects of income level on types of volunteering suggest that lower income respondents are not averse to helping. Rather, there may be network and access issues--that is, potential volunteers with lower incomes may be outside the universe of certain voluntary organizations and therefore are never asked to help.

Education appears to have a more universal impact on volunteering. For *all* three major categories of helping--help to families, voluntary services to individuals and volunteer work for organizations--those with the least education are the least likely to help. The strongest and clearest impact of education is on volunteer work for organizations (see **Table 2**). In addition, for a number of specific types of volunteer work for organizations--church work, leadership activities, participation in social welfare and health organizations, and participation in citizenship organizations--those with the highest levels of education are the most likely to volunteer; those with the least education are the least likely to volunteer. Education also affects how much time volunteers contribute: college-educated volunteers tend to contribute more hours per month than less educated volunteers.

One way to interpret the impact of income and education on volunteering is that these are resources, and elderly with access to these resources have more discretionary use of their time. There are also other factors which might be interpreted as resources. For example, being married can be understood as "having a spouse." Married elderly are more likely than non-married elderly to do at least some forms of volunteer work (see **Table 2**)--that is, they are more likely to help

their families, they do more volunteer work for organizations, overall, and they are more likely to participate in both church work and citizenship-types of volunteer organizations. Possibly, the married elderly have wider social networks, both in family ties and in affiliations with church congregations and other community organizations. Moreover, the non-married elderly tend to be older and have lower incomes. Marital status, however, is not significantly related to voluntary services for individuals--that is, the married and non-married are about equally likely to provide such services.

Employment status also can be understood in terms of access to resources: employed elderly not only have access to salaries but, more significantly, they are part of networks associated with their work roles. As **Table 2** shows, older persons who are employed have higher rates of volunteering for organizations. The specific types of activities in which workers have elevated rates of participation might have a logical connection to work roles: workers are particularly likely to volunteer in a leadership capacity and to participate in citizenship-types of organizations. However, workers are *not* more likely to provide voluntary services to individuals or help to families.

Good health and ability to function, quite clearly, are resources. Elderly with functional deficits have lower rates of participation in all three major forms of voluntary labor: help to their families, services to individuals and volunteer work for organizations. We should take note of the fact, however, that although elderly with functional problems have lower rates of volunteering, their contributions are nonetheless substantial. Among elderly with one or more functional problems, half do at least some volunteer work for organizations! (See **Table 2.**)

The "old-old" (75+) and the "oldest-old" (85+) are less likely than the "young-old" (under 75) to do all three kinds of volunteering--help to families, voluntary services to individuals, and volunteer work for organizations. The difference in volunteer work for organizations between the the youngest age group and the oldest is substantial (see **Table 2**). Nonetheless, it is notable that 39 percent of the elderly[7] who are 85+ describe volunteer work that they do for organizations. Moreover, among those who volunteer, age is *not* significantly related to the amount of time volunteering--that is, old-old and young-old volunteers are similar in the amount of time they spend doing volunteer work!

We might expect that there would be more volunteering in Greater Minnesota, which is comprised mostly of small towns and rural areas, than in the metropolitan Twin Cities area; but, overall, we find only small differences. The elderly in Greater Minnesota are somewhat more likely to provide voluntary services to individuals and to do volunteer work for organizations.

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[7] All of these percentages are based on the non-institutionalized, elderly population. It should be pointed out that more health problems would be found among the elderly, especially those at older ages, if the institutionalized elderly were included in the sample.

However, older volunteers in Greater Minnesota do *not* contribute more time than Twin City older volunteers. There are two specific types of help that the elderly in Greater Minnesota are more likely to provide than those in the Twin Cities: the elderly in Greater Minnesota are more likely to do church work and to help individuals with transportation. These two differences conform to images of smaller communities--where we might expect more church involvement and more help to neighbors, especially since transportation is often a problem in small towns and rural areas.

Table 2 suggests that being a driver (or having a spouse who drives) has a rather large impact on the propensity to volunteer. The respondents were asked: "Do you (or your spouse) own and drive a car?" Drivers are about twice as likely as non-drivers to help their families and to do volunteer work for organizations; drivers are almost three times as likely to provide voluntary services to individuals. If volunteering is understood as one kind of leisure activity, then those who cannot drive are likely to lack an opportunity to participate in this, as well as other, leisure time activities. We can draw an interesting inference when we put together **Tables 1** and **2**. **Table 2** suggests that non-drivers are non-volunteers. **Table 1** shows that the most frequent voluntary service to individuals is transportation. This suggests that the ability to drive divides the givers from the takers--that is, the driving elderly help the non-driving elderly. This is one small example of how elderly, as a cohort and community, appear to help one another and thus, in effect, "pay their own way."

Table 2 does not include findings on gender and volunteering, because gender is *not* significantly related to any of the major categories of volunteering--help to families, voluntary services to individuals, or volunteer work for organizations. That is, older men and women are about equally likely to be volunteers, in general. However, our data suggest that the picture is somewhat complicated because older men and women tend to differ in the specific types of helping they choose to do. These differences largely conform to gender role expectations. Women are five times more likely to help others with food and they are somewhat more likely to do "visiting" or provide "person-to-person care." The "house-and-yard care" type of help, which includes both yard work and repairs, is more likely done by older men. In volunteer work for organizations, women are more likely to do church work, to help with food for organizations, and to be involved with social welfare and health organizations. Men are somewhat more likely to work for citizenship-type organizations; these include a number of traditionally men-only clubs, like the Masons, Shriners, and the Lions. Women are somewhat more likely than men to provide "other services" for organizations. These services include a variety of more-or-less unskilled types of jobs (stuffing envelopes, setting up and cleaning up after a social event, working in a gift shop), many of which have traditionally been done by women. One significant gender difference is that older women volunteers tend to spend more time in helping and volunteer work than older male volunteers (with a mean of 15 and 11 hours per month, respectively). Men are more likely to

spend only one to 5 hours per month volunteering, while women are more likely to spend 15 hours a month or more. It may be that the specific types of work done by men versus women account, at least in part, for the differences in amount of time spent.

Summary and Implications: The Productive Potential of Older Minnesotans

Our data suggest that older Minnesotans contribute about 70 million hours a year in volunteer time. Three-fifths of older Minnesotans do volunteer work for organizations; two-fifths of older Minnesotans provide voluntary services to individuals in their communities; and three-fifths provide help to their families. Overall, only 16 percent do not do any volunteer work--that is, do not do any volunteer work for organizations and do not provide any help to relatives, neighbors, friends or other individuals in their communities. However, about half of older volunteers spend less than a couple of hours per week in volunteer activities.

The types of work done in helping individuals tend to be very different from volunteer work for organizations. The most frequent type of help to individuals is transportation. The most frequent type of volunteer work for organizations is church work.

Income, education, being married, being employed, not having functional problems, being young-old, living in a non-metropolitan area, and being able to drive (or being the spouse of a driver) are all positively associated with the propensity to volunteer.

Given the large number of elderly who already volunteer in Minnesota, it is probably unlikely that many more elderly can be persuaded to volunteer. It may be possible, however, to induce those who already volunteer to contribute more time, since most elderly do not contribute more than a couple of hours per week. More might be done also to utilize the special skills of older citizens. Many elderly in Minnesota are college-educated (27%). Nearly a third (30%) have had professional or managerial jobs before retirement. More use might be made of these sophisticated, well-educated, highly skilled seniors.

It may also be possible to expand the support services for volunteers, the range of jobs and positions, and the systems for facilitating volunteering. One format that has been tried in some communities is the "voluntary-services-exchange-bank." Programs based on the exchange of service credits may help to alleviate some of the burdens of long-term care. (See Pynoos et al., 1984; Cahn, 1988.)

In trying to analyze the data on voluntary service from the Minnesota Senior Study, we came to realize how little is actually known about volunteering--especially about older volunteers. Further research is needed to learn more about how and why elderly volunteer. An in-depth study of older volunteers could identify what motivates volunteer work, what limits or barriers are confronted by older volunteers, and what further opportunities exist for developing the productive contributions of older citizens.

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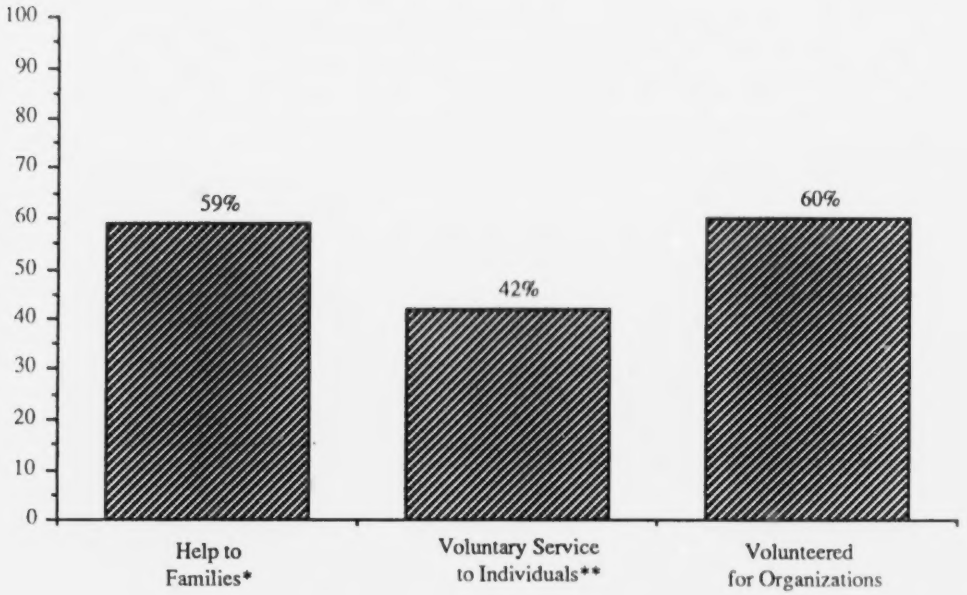
FIGURE 1
Percent Who Helped Families*, Gave Voluntary Service to Individuals,** and Performed Volunteer Work for Organizations



* Includes: care for grandchildren, caregiving when someone is ill, and help for adult children.

** Respondents were asked: "Sometimes people help others by doing things such as driving them to appointments, church, shopping, doctors; bringing them meals or groceries; helping with house or yardwork; visiting; and so on. In the past 12 months, have you provided any of this kind of help?" May include help to friends, neighbors, and relatives.

FIGURE 2
Number of Hours Volunteered per Month

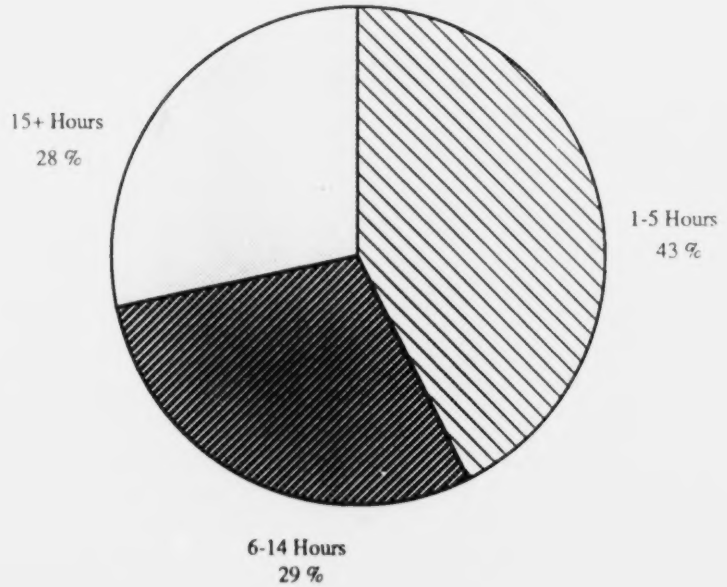


Table 1. Percent Who Report Doing Various Types of Volunteer Work

Help to Families*	
Caring for Grandchildren	43%
Services to Adult Children**	36%
Caring for Someone Who is Ill	25%
Voluntary Services to Individuals	
Transportation Help to Individuals	28%
Visits to Individuals	13%
House and Yard Work	8%
Food Assistance to Individuals	7%
Person-to-Person Help	6%
Neighboring	5%
Volunteer Work for Organizations	
Church Work	43%
General Services to Organizations	32%
Work for Citizenship Organizations	23%
Food for Organizations	19%
Work for Social Welfare and Health Organizations	17%
Leadership/Administration	17%
Transportation for Organizations	4%

* Percent who said they helped in the past 3 months.

** Includes the following types of help to children not in the same household: home repairs, gardening, housework, sewing, cooking, laundry, and transportation.

Table 2. Profile of Volunteers: Percent Who Help Their Families, Provide Voluntary Services to Individuals and Do Volunteer Work for Organizations*

	Help to Families	Voluntary Services for Individuals	Volunteer Work for Organizations
Total	59%	42%	60%
Per Capita Income			
Under $5,000	---	---	50%
$5,000 - 9,999	---	---	60%
$10,000 - 14,999	---	---	66%
$15,000 or More	---	---	71%
Education			
Less than High School	55%	36%	49%
High School Graduate	64%	45%	61%
Some College or More	60%	47%	72%
Marital Status			
Married	67%	---	62%
Non-married	43%	---	54%
Employment Status			
Working	---	---	67%
Not Working	---	---	58%
Functional Problems			
No Functional Problems	64%	46%	65%
With Functional Problems	50%	34%	50%
Age			
60-64	73%	45%	64%
65-74	65%	47%	62%
75-84	42%	35%	54%
85+	22%	18%	39%
Region			
Twin Cities Metro Area	---	38%	56%
Greater Minnesota	---	45%	63%
Ability to Drive			
Driver or Spouse of Driver	64%	47%	65%
Non-driver	33%	17%	31%

* The Chi Square statistic was used to test for a relationship between volunteering and a series of variables. These tests were carried out for each of the 3 types of volunteering. Only those percentages are reported where results of the test indicated a relationship (i.e., $p < .01$).